

Coosa Mehshree, or Stuffed Summer Squash

a recipe from www.maureenabood.com

The meat and rice stuffing mixture for this recipe is a standard stuffing that is also used for cabbage rolls and grape leaf rolls. I like to use ground beef for this dish, but you can also use ground lamb. If you have the patience to let the coosa rest, after its been cooked, for a day in the refrigerator before eating it, you'll find the flavors develop wonderfully.

12-18 coosa, small zucchini, and/or yellow squash, washed and cored
½ lb. ground chuck or lamb
½ cup medium grain rice, rinsed
½ t. salt
¼ t. freshly ground black pepper
½ t. cinnamon
1 28 oz. can tomato puree or tomato sauce
6 large cloves garlic, peeled and halved (green sprout removed)

Use your clean hands (come on, it feels nice) to combine the meat, rice, salt, pepper and cinnamon. If you are my mother, you will taste the meat raw without a thought of eating raw beef that you didn't grind yourself, then adjust the seasoning. Or you could do as we learned in culinary school and cook off a sample, a temoine (you never forget those terms you missed on the final exam. That's one of them, and I am afraid my French may be off even now) in a small frying pan. Or you can just trust my measurements above and go with it.

Loosely fill each coosa with the stuffing. Loosely is the key word here, because the rice does not like to be crowded. It needs room to expand, so fill only about ¾ of the coosa with stuffing, and don't pack it in. You may have leftover stuffing that you can form into meatballs to be cooked with the coosa.

In a bowl, season the tomato puree or sauce with ½ teaspoon salt and pepper. Place the coosa (stuffed end up but tilted so that you don't need as much liquid to cover them) in a tall pot with the garlic cloves interspersed and the meatballs on top. Pour the tomato puree over all. Pour water over that until the coosa and meatballs are just covered (some can stick out a bit above the liquid). Cover the pot and bring the liquid to a boil over medium heat. Reduce the heat and simmer until the squash is tender and the meat is cooked through, about 50 minutes.

Remove the coosa to a serving bowl and taste the sauce. Adjust seasoning, adding salt and pepper as needed.

Serve the coosa in individual bowls or on plates with the sauce spooned over it. You can also make a cut down one side of the coosa with the side of a spoon and ladle the sauce over that, to whet the whistle of the stuffing. Top with labneh (thickened yogurt) and eat with thin pita bread or Lebanese flatbread.